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Superconducting and normal state properties of the systems $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{MxPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ (M=Ce,Th)

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Superconducting and normal state properties of the systems $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{M}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ ($M = \text{Ce}, \text{Th}$)K. Huang,^{1,2,3,*} D. Yazici,^{1,2,†} B. D. White,^{1,2,‡} I. Jeon,^{2,3} A. J. Breindel,^{1,2} N. Pouse,^{1,2} and M. B. Maple^{1,2,3,§}¹*Department of Physics, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, California 92093, USA*²*Center for Advanced Nanoscience, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, California 92093, USA*³*Materials Science and Engineering Program, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, California 92093, USA*

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Electrical resistivity, magnetization, and specific heat measurements were performed on polycrystalline samples of the filled-skutterudite systems $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{M}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ ($M = \text{Ce}$ and Th). Superconductivity in $\text{LaPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ was quickly suppressed with Ce substitution and no evidence for superconductivity was found down to 1.1 K for $x > 0.2$. Temperature-dependent specific heat data at low temperatures for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ show a change from power-law to exponential behavior, which may be an indication for multiband superconductivity in $\text{LaPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$. A similar crossover was observed in the $\text{Pr}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ system. However, the suppression rates of the superconducting transition temperatures $T_c(x)$ in the two systems are quite disparate, indicating a difference in the nature of superconductivity, which is conventional in $\text{LaPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ and unconventional in $\text{PrPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$. In comparison, a nearly linear and smooth evolution of T_c with increasing Th was observed in the $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ system, with no change of the superconducting energy gap in the temperature dependence of the specific heat, suggesting similar types of superconductivity in both the $\text{LaPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ and $\text{ThPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ compounds.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Recently, a new branch of filled skutterudites was discovered with the chemical formula $\text{APt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ [1,2]. Several members of this branch were found to exhibit superconductivity with $A = \text{La}$ and Pr exhibiting the highest superconducting transition temperatures, $T_c \sim 8$ K [1–3]. Considerable attention has been focused on $\text{PrPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ as it exhibits signs of unconventional superconductivity [4–10]. However, investigations into $\text{SrPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ and $\text{BaPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ show that the superconductivity is conventional BCS-type which originates from, and is intrinsic to, the Pt-Ge cages [1]. Furthermore, $\text{LaPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ was also found to exhibit evidence for conventional BCS-type superconductivity from nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) and ^{73}Ge nuclear quadrupole resonance (NQR) measurements [11,12].

The compound $\text{CePt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ is thought to lie on the border between an intermediate-valence (IV) and a Kondo lattice compound [11]. Initial investigations into $\text{CePt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ revealed a broad maximum in the magnetization $M(T)$, which can be a characteristic of intermediate-valence compounds. However, high-resolution x-ray absorption spectroscopy measurements indicated that the Ce ions exhibit a temperature-independent valence close to $\sim 3^+$ [13]. Recent inelastic neutron scattering measurements find a wider quasielastic peak at higher energies, consistent with an IV system, as well as the absence of crystalline electric field effects expected in a Kondo system [14].

Therefore we decided to investigate the $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ system to complement our previous study of the $\text{Pr}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ system. We anticipated that these two

investigations could provide valuable insight into the nature of superconductivity in the Pt-Ge based filled skutterudites. Additionally, studies of $\text{ThPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ have uncovered signatures of an exotic form of superconductivity from μSR measurements [15], power-law contributions to specific heat [16], and a complex Fermi surface from band-structure calculations [17]; these results motivated a parallel study on the system $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$.

We found that T_c in $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ is suppressed rapidly and almost linearly with increasing x , with the onset of superconductivity no longer being observable down to 1.1 K for $x \geq 0.2$. In contrast, the onset of superconductivity in $\text{Pr}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ persists up to $x = 0.5$, and the T_c versus x curve has pronounced positive curvature [9]. In the $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ system, we observed a smooth and continuous change in T_c versus x , which is inconsistent with the behavior that would be expected for the existence of different types of superconducting states [18,19]; i.e., the continuous and smooth behavior of T_c versus x instead suggests that both $\text{LaPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ and $\text{ThPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ exhibit the same type of superconductivity.

A change in the temperature dependence of the specific heat in the superconducting state of $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ is observed; this may be evidence for a crossover from multiband superconductivity in $\text{LaPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ to isotropic single-band superconductivity in the $x > 0$ samples. A similar crossover in the specific heat behavior was observed when Ce was substituted into $\text{PrPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$, a material with well-established evidence for multiband superconductivity [6–9]. Specific heat measurements on the system $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ from $x = 0$ to $x = 0.2$ did not exhibit a similar change. Taken together with previous studies, it is possible that both $\text{LaPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ and $\text{ThPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ are multiband superconductors.

II. EXPERIMENTAL DETAILS

Polycrystalline samples of $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ ($x = 0, 0.05, 0.1, 0.15, 0.2, 0.4, 0.6, 0.80, 1$) and $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ ($x = 0,$

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0.2, 0.4, 0.6, 0.8, 1) were synthesized in an atmosphere of ultrahigh-purity argon by arc-melting in a custom built arc furnace employing a zirconium getter on a water-cooled copper hearth. The starting materials were La ingots (Sigma-Aldrich, 99.9%), Ce rods (Alfa Aesar 3N, EPSI 99.9%), Th pieces, Pt sponge arc-melted into spheres (99.9999+%), and Ge pieces (Alfa Aesar 99.9999+%). The starting materials were weighed out in the molar stoichiometric ratios, arc-melted together, and then flipped over and arc-melted again four more times to promote homogeneity. All samples were heat treated in a sealed quartz tube under an inert atmosphere (200 torr Ar) for 336 hours at 800 °C.

Powder x-ray diffraction (XRD) measurements were performed using a Bruker D8 x-ray diffractometer with a Cu K_α source. Four-wire electrical resistivity measurements were performed from 300 K down to ~ 1.1 K in a pumped ^4He Dewar. Magnetization measurements were performed between 300 and 2 K in a Quantum Design Magnetic Property Measurement System (MPMS) equipped with a 7-T superconducting magnet. Specific heat measurements were performed down to 1.8 K using a Quantum Design Physical Property Measurement System (PPMS) DynaCool. The heat capacity measurements employed a standard thermal relaxation technique.

III. RESULTS

Rietveld refinements were performed on the powder XRD patterns for each sample using GSAS [20] and EXPGUI [21]. Displayed in Fig. 1(a) is an XRD pattern for $\text{La}_{0.4}\text{Ce}_{0.6}\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$, representative of the XRD patterns observed for values of x throughout both the $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ and $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ systems. The blue line is the experimental XRD pattern and

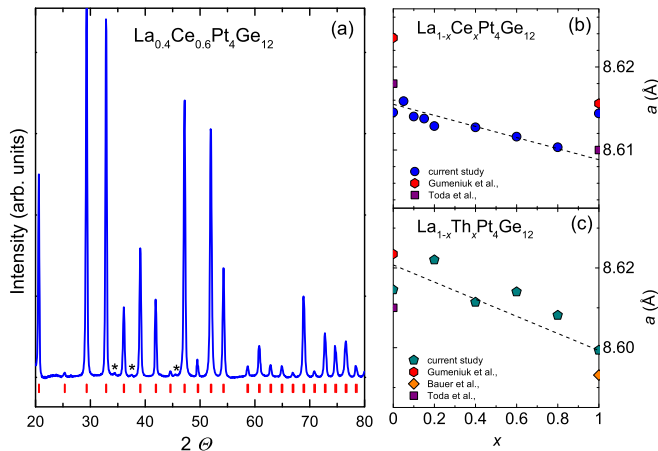


FIG. 1. (a) Powder x-ray diffraction pattern for a representative sample of $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ ($x = 0.6$) where the blue line represents the intensity versus 2θ and the red tick marks locate the 2θ positions of the expected Bragg reflections for the refined filled-skutterudite crystal structure. Black asterisks indicate Bragg reflections associated with a Ge/PtGe₂ impurity phase. The lattice parameter, a , is plotted for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ in (b) and for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ in (c). The dashed lines are guides to the eye. The a versus x data for both $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ and $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ obey Vegard's law, except for $x = 1$, in $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$, where a has a larger value (see text). The a values for $\text{LaPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$, $\text{CePt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$, and $\text{ThPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ are plotted for comparison.

the red tick marks below locate the 2θ positions of the expected Bragg reflections for the refined filled-skutterudite crystal structure. The cubic filled-skutterudite crystal structure (space group $Im\bar{3}$) was observed over the entire range of x for both series. As is commonly observed in the Pt-Ge based skutterudites [2,7,8,11,14,22,23], small impurity phases of Ge and/or PtGe₂ (at most up to $\sim 5\%$ by mass) were detected in the samples. Figures 1(b) and 1(c) display the lattice parameter a for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ (blue circles) and $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ (teal pentagons) with dashed lines serving as guides to the eye. The system $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ exhibits a linear decrease of a as x increases with the end members exhibiting a values of 8.618 Å for $x = 0$ and 8.615 Å for $x = 1$. The plot of a versus x for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ shows a sudden increase in a of about 0.3% at $x = 1$. This may be because the XRD measurements for the sample with $x = 1$ were made using a different x-ray diffractometer. Another possible explanation for the larger a value for the sample with $x = 1$ is that there is a known sample dependence in the Pt-Ge based filled skutterudites; reported values for a of $\text{MPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ ($M = \text{La}, \text{Pr}, \text{Nd}, \text{Ce}$) differ by roughly 0.5% [2,11].

The electrical resistivity $\rho(T)$, measured in zero applied magnetic field, is displayed for the series $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ in Fig. 2(a) and $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ in Fig. 2(b). The system $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ exhibits an overall increase in $\rho(T)$ with increasing x , except for $x = 1$ at low temperature, which exhibits a large decrease below 150 K. The overall shape of $\rho(T)$ exhibits the behavior of a simple metal, while at higher temperature, it has a negative curvature. This type of $\rho(T)$ behavior is often observed in the Ce-based filled skutterudites such as $\text{CeFe}_4\text{Sb}_{12}$ [24]. However, for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$, $\rho(T)$ does not exhibit any clear trend with increasing x , possibly due to uncertainties in the measurement of the geometrical factors of the resistivity samples. Plotted in Fig. 2(c) are the scaled $\rho(T)$ data for the system $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ such that the slopes, $d\rho/dT$, are identical to $d\rho/dT$ for $\text{LaPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ at high temperature. The scaled $\rho(T)$ data clearly show that additional electron scattering associated with the $4f$ electrons is introduced by Ce substitution. In contrast, when the same procedure is performed on the $\rho(T)$ data for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$, displayed in Fig. 2(d), the scaled $\rho(T)$ data collapse onto a single curve, suggesting that Th substitution does not introduce any additional mechanisms for scattering electrons. The intrinsic differences in the $\rho(T)$ curves in Fig. 2(b) are due to differences in lattice scattering (electron-phonon scattering depends on the Debye temperature, $\Theta_D = 220$ K [13], in the Bloch-Grüneisen formula), and the nonmonotonic trend of the unscaled ρ at 300 K may be a consequence of errors in estimating the geometrical factor for the $x = 0.4, 0.6$, and 0.8 samples.

For the $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ and $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ series, the $\rho(T)$ data are well described by $\rho(T) = \rho_0 + AT^2$ up to ~ 250 K² in Figs. 3(c) and 3(d), indicating that both systems exhibit Fermi liquid behavior. A is a fitting parameter and ρ_0 is the residual resistivity. The insets in Figs. 2(a) and 2(b) plot the residual resistivity ratio (RRR) as a function of x for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ and $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$, respectively, where the RRR is defined as ρ_{300}/ρ_0 , where ρ_{300} is the value of ρ at 300 K. The RRR versus x exhibits a parabolic shape with the minimum at $x = 0.6$ for both $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ (RRR = 3)

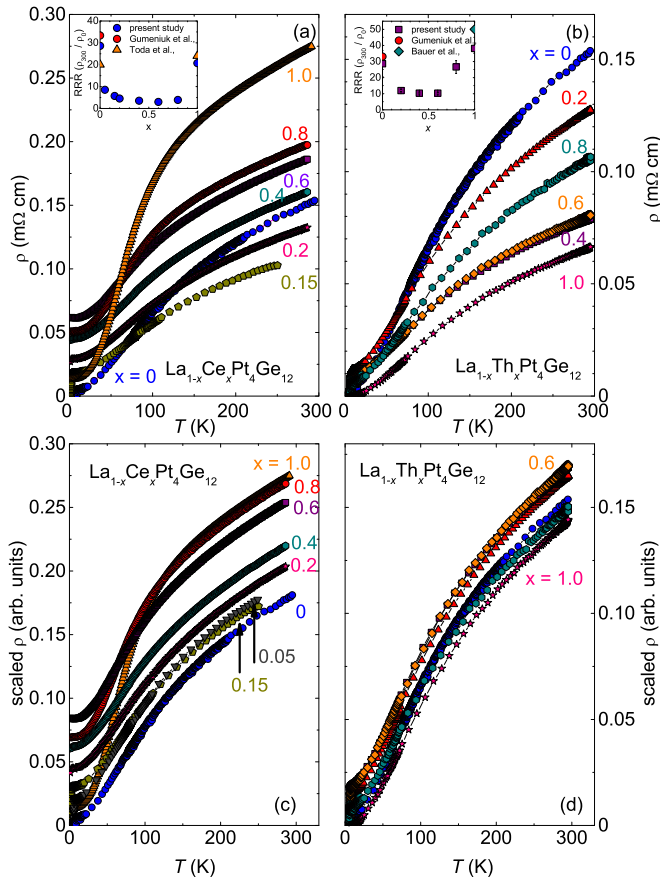


FIG. 2. (a) Electrical resistivity ρ versus temperature T for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$. The electrical resistivity at high temperature is enhanced with increasing Ce concentration. The inset displays the residual resistivity ratio $\text{RRR} (\rho_{300}/\rho_0)$ versus x for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ (blue circles for this work), plotted as a function of x . The ratio exhibits a parabolic behavior with a minimum $\text{RRR} = 3$ for $x = 0.6$. (b) ρ versus T for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ which tends to exhibit an overall decrease of ρ with increasing x . The RRR versus x is displayed in the inset for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ (purple squares) with the minimum $\text{RRR} = 10$ at $x = 0.6$, similar to the parabolic behavior observed in $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$. (c) Scaled $\rho(T)$ data for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ such that the high-temperature slope $d\rho/dT$ matches the high-temperature $d\rho/dT$ of $\text{LaPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$. (d) Scaled $\rho(T)$ data for the $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ system. The curves appear to collapse onto a single curve.

and $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ ($\text{RRR} = 10$), close to the predicted minimum for simple alloys at $x = 0.5$.

There are clear drops in $\rho(T)$ at T_c . To determine T_c , the ratio $\rho(T)/\rho_{10}$, where ρ_{10} is $\rho(T = 10 \text{ K})$ (a representative value of $\rho(T)$ in the normal state) was plotted versus T in Figs. 3(a) and 3(b) for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ and $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$, respectively. T_c was defined as the temperature where $\rho(T)/\rho_{10} = 0.5$ and the width of the transition was characterized by the temperatures where $\rho(T)/\rho_{10} = 0.9$ and 0.1 . For $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$, T_c is rapidly suppressed with increasing x , with only the onset of superconductivity observed for $x = 0.2$ from measurements down to 1.1 K. In the system $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$, T_c is also suppressed with increasing x , from 8.3 K for $x = 0$ down to 4.5 K for $x = 1$. Th substitution suppresses T_c less rapidly than Ce substitution; however, this

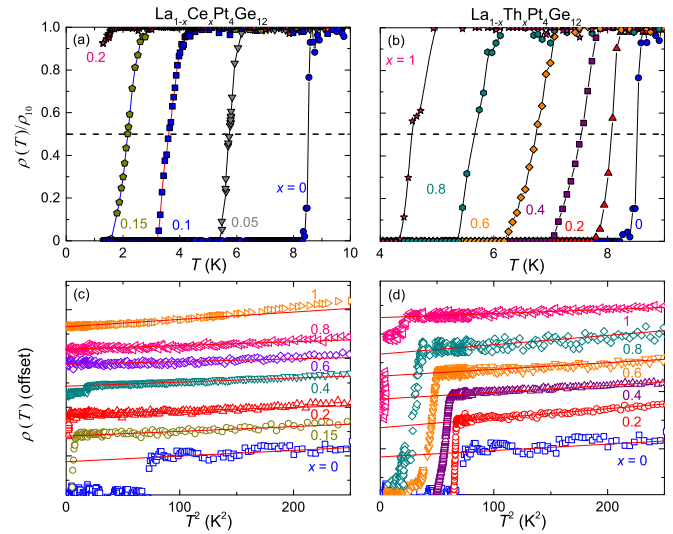


FIG. 3. The electrical resistivity normalized by ρ at $T = 10 \text{ K}$, $\rho(T)/\rho_{10}$, versus T for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ in (a) and $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ in (b). The superconducting critical temperature T_c , where T_c is defined as $\rho(T)/\rho_{10} = 0.5$, for both systems decreases with increasing x . Measurements down to 1.1 K reveal that the onset of superconductivity is observable up to $x = 0.2$ for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$. The T_c for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ decreases almost linearly with x , with the lowest value of $T_c = 4.5 \text{ K}$ observed for $x = 1.0$, close to the reported value [3,16]. Selected ρ versus T^2 data for (c) $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ and (d) $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ with offsets for visual clarity. Linear fits of $\rho(T) = \rho_0 + AT^2$ were performed up to roughly 250 K^2 .

is not surprising since its $5f$ electron shell is empty so that Th is nonmagnetic and $\text{ThPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ exhibits superconductivity. In contrast, $\text{CePt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ exhibits no ordered state down to 50 mK [11,13,25].

Magnetization divided by magnetic field, M/H , versus T data for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ are shown in Fig. 4(a) where the $M(T)/H$ data were scaled by a factor of 1000 for clarity. $M(T)/H$ exhibits Curie-Weiss behavior above 200 K for all x and passes through a broad maximum around 80 K, followed by an upturn as $T \rightarrow 0 \text{ K}$. The deviations from Curie-Weiss behavior, manifested by the broad maxima, could be an indication of either intermediate-valence (IV) behavior of Ce or Kondo lattice behavior [2]. The broad maxima become smaller in amplitude and width as the peak position shifts to lower temperatures with decreasing x , as seen in Fig. 4(c). This behavior may suggest that the local Kondo temperature, T_K , also decreases with decreasing x and that the $4f$ electrons are well localized at high temperatures. If T_K arises from the fully trivalent Ce^{3+} , then La substitution would weaken the Ce-Ce interactions, which would suppress the broad maxima as well as T_K . However, it should be noted that this behavior differs from that observed for La substitution into the compound $\text{CeRu}_4\text{Sb}_{12}$, where the broad maximum in $M(T)$ does not shift in temperature with increasing La concentration [26]. The small upturns in $M(T)/H$ as $T \rightarrow 0 \text{ K}$ do not scale with x , making the upturns more likely due to small amounts of paramagnetic impurities, as described in previous literature [9,10,27], instead of being a signature of non-Fermi liquid behavior [28]. Both χ_{300} , $M(T)/H$ at

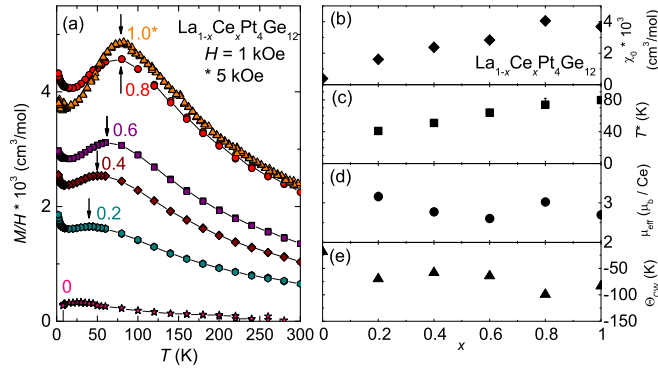


FIG. 4. (a) Magnetization divided by applied magnetic field, M/H , versus T from 300 K down to 2 K for the $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ system. The magnetic susceptibility, $\chi(T) = M(T)/H$, increases with increasing x , exhibiting an almost tenfold increase between $x = 0$ and 1. (b) The low-temperature magnetic susceptibility χ_0 , plotted as a function of x . χ_0 was determined by extrapolating $M(T)/H$ data to $T \rightarrow 0$ K while ignoring the small upturns observed at the lowest temperatures; these were determined to be due to small amounts of paramagnetic impurities. (c) T^* , the temperature where the broad maximum in the M/H versus T data is centered as indicated by the black arrows in (a), plotted versus x . The local maximum is possible evidence for either intermediate valence Ce or Kondo lattice behavior. T^* shifts to higher temperatures with increasing x , up to 80 K at $x = 1$, consistent with reported literature for $\text{CePt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ [11]. The effective magnetic moment μ_{eff} and Curie-Weiss temperature θ_{CW} were determined from Curie-Weiss fits performed on the inverse M/H data in the temperature range 200–300 K and are plotted versus x in (d) and (e), respectively.

300 K, and χ_0 , $M(T)/H$ as $T \rightarrow 0$ K, are enhanced with increasing x . χ_{300} increases from ~ 0 cm³/mol for $x = 0$ to 2.3×10^{-3} cm³/mol for $x = 1$. χ_0 was determined by extrapolating $M(T)/H$ as $T \rightarrow 0$ K from data at temperatures above those where the broad upturns are observed. As can be seen in Fig. 4(b), χ_0 increases with increasing x , exhibiting an almost tenfold increase from $\chi_0 = 0.39 \times 10^{-3}$ cm³/mol for $x = 0$ up to $\chi_0 = 3.69 \times 10^{-3}$ cm³/mol for $x = 1$.

Curie-Weiss law fits were performed on the $M(T)/H$ data between 200 and 300 K for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$; this temperature range was used because the broad maxima in $M(T)/H$ made fitting to lower temperatures inappropriate. The effective magnetic moment μ_{eff} and Curie-Weiss temperature θ_{CW} for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ were determined using the relation $M(T)/H = C_0/(T - \theta_{\text{CW}})$, where $C_0 = \mu_{\text{eff}}^2 N_A / 3k_B$, N_A is Avogadro's number and k_B is Boltzmann's constant. The values we obtained for μ_{eff} and θ_{CW} are plotted in Figs. 4(d) and 4(e), respectively. $\mu_{\text{eff}} = 2.67 \mu_B/\text{Ce}$ for $x = 1$, which is slightly larger than the predicted value of $2.54 \mu_B$ for the Ce^{3+} electronic configuration using Hund's rules; the limited temperature range for the Curie-Weiss fits, caused by the broad maximum, is possibly responsible for the disparity between the measured and calculated μ_{eff} values. The effective moment μ_{eff} increases slowly with decreasing x and exhibits values close to the free ion values derived from Hund's rules, reaching $3.16 \mu_B/\text{Ce}$ for $x = 0.2$. The Curie-Weiss temperature $\theta_{\text{CW}} = -83$ K of $\text{CePt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ has a magnitude about twice as large as the value originally reported ($\theta_{\text{CW}} = -39.2$ K) [13],

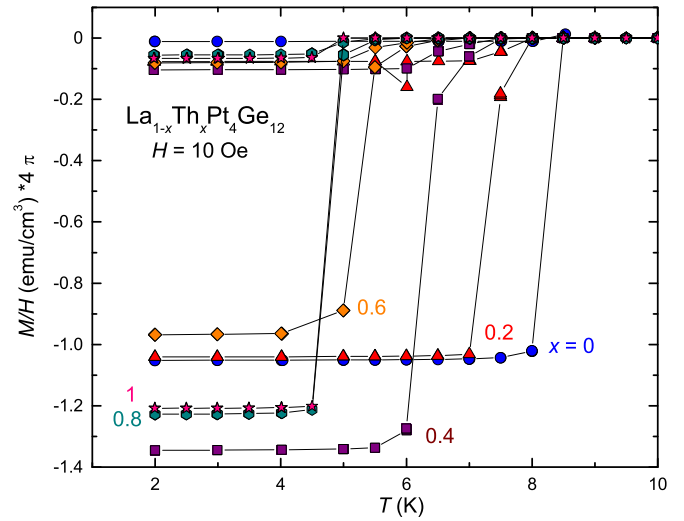


FIG. 5. Magnetization divided by magnetic field plotted as $4\pi M/H$ versus T for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ from 2–10 K in an external magnetic field $H = 10$ Oe. The superconducting critical temperature T_c decreases as x increases, from 8 K for $x = 0$ down to 4.3 K for $x = 1$. The nearly unity value of $|4\pi M/H|$ is evidence for bulk superconductivity throughout the $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ series.

and within the scatter of the data, remains nearly constant with a value of -80 K throughout the entire series.

$M(T)/H$ measurements were performed for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ samples in an applied magnetic field $H = 10$ Oe to determine T_c and the superconducting volume fraction, v , as can be seen in Fig. 5. The superconducting volume fraction, v , was estimated using the equation $M(T)/H \times d = v$, where $M(T)/H$ is in units of emu/mol and d is the molar density of the compound in units of mol/cm³. T_c for $\text{LaPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ is 8 K, and it is suppressed with increasing x down to 4.3 K for $x = 1$, consistent with reported literature for the end-member compounds [2,3]. The volume fraction, v , is consistently near -1 for all x . This is evidence that the sample completely expels magnetic fields and is consistent with bulk superconductivity.

Specific heat divided by temperature $C(T)/T$ versus T plots for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ ($x = 0, 0.05$, and 0.1) and for $\text{La}_{0.8}\text{Th}_{0.2}\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ are displayed in Fig. 6(a). T_c was determined from idealized equal entropy conserving constructions about the specific heat jump associated with superconductivity as seen for $\text{La}_{0.95}\text{Ce}_{0.05}\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ in the inset of Fig. 6(a). In $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$, T_c was rapidly suppressed with increasing x : from $T_c = 8.3$ K for $x = 0$ down to $T_c = 3.2$ K for $x = 0.1$. For $\text{La}_{0.8}\text{Th}_{0.2}\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$, only a small decrease in T_c was observed, shifting down to $T_c = 7.3$ K.

Linear fits using the equation $C(T)/T = \gamma + \beta T^2$ were performed on the specific heat data from the lowest temperature in the normal state up to temperatures as high as linear fits were possible to determine the Sommerfeld coefficient γ and Debye temperature Θ_D . The coefficient of the phonon contribution to the specific heat β is related to Θ_D by the relation $\Theta_D = [1944 \times (n/\beta)]^{1/3}$ K, where $n = 17$ is the number of atoms in the formula unit. The electronic contribution to specific heat γ exhibits a moderate increase with initial Ce substitution where $\gamma = 50$ mJ/mol K² for $x = 0$

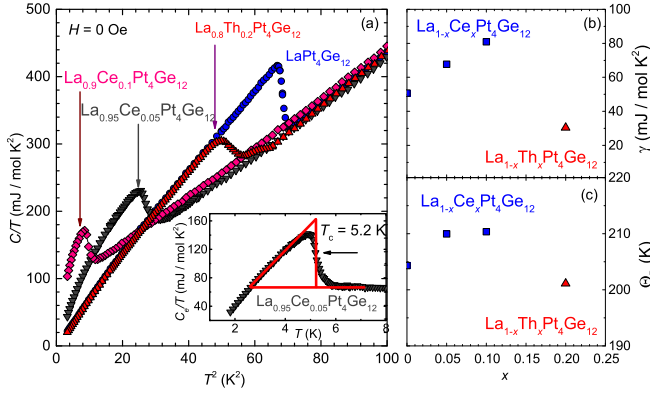


FIG. 6. (a) Specific heat divided by temperature $C(T)/T$ versus T^2 for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ ($x = 0, 0.05$, and 0.1) and $\text{La}_{0.8}\text{Th}_{0.2}\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ down to 2 K in zero magnetic field. The superconducting critical temperature T_c is suppressed with increasing x , with Ce substitution having a more pronounced effect than Th substitution. T_c values were determined from idealized equal entropy constructions fitted to the electronic contribution to specific heat, C_e/T , as shown in the inset for $\text{La}_{0.95}\text{Ce}_{0.05}\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$. Linear fits were performed on the C/T data plotted versus T^2 in the lowest-temperature regions in the normal state to determine the Sommerfeld coefficient γ and the Debye temperature Θ_D ; these quantities are plotted in (b) and (c), respectively.

and reaches 80 mJ/mol K² for $x = 0.1$, close to the reported values of $\gamma \sim 100$ mJ/mol K² for $\text{CePt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ [9,13]. Thorium substitution results in a slight suppression of γ , where $\gamma = 30$ mJ/mol K² for $\text{La}_{0.8}\text{Th}_{0.2}\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$, as shown in Fig. 6(b). Θ_D appears to be insensitive to Ce or Th substitution, fluctuating less than 5% from $\Theta_D = 204$ K for $x = 0$, as seen in Fig. 6(c).

Interestingly, negative curvature was observed in the C/T versus T^2 data as $T \rightarrow 0$ K for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ with $x \geq 0.05$. To investigate this behavior, the electronic contribution to the specific heat $C_e(T)$ was determined by subtracting the phonon contribution from $C(T)/T$ and plotting as $\log(C_e(T)/\gamma T_c)$ versus T_c/T in Fig. 7(a) for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ and (b) for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$. The data sets were offset for clarity. The solid lines represent fits to each data set. For $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$, $C_e(T)$ for the samples with $x = 0.05$ and 0.1 is well described by an exponential temperature dependence of the form $be^{-(\Delta/T)}$, where b is a fitting parameter and Δ represents the superconducting energy gap. Best fit values for b were roughly 9.8 and 7.3 for $x = 0.05$ and 0.1 , respectively. The best fit values were $\Delta/T_c = 1.52$ and 1.38 for $x = 0.05$ and 0.1 , respectively; while the values of Δ/T_c could vary depending on the fitting range [30], the exponential behavior is still evidence for BCS superconductivity. Attempts to fit $C_e(T)$ data for $x = 0$ with the function $be^{-(\Delta/T)}$ were unsuccessful. However, fits using a power-law function of the form cT^n , where c is a fitting parameter, were found to describe $C_e(T)$ versus T for $x = 0$ very well, where $n = 2.5$. The change from cT^n to $be^{-(\Delta/T)}$ temperature dependencies may be explained by a transition from a multiband superconductor to a single-band isotropic s -wave superconductor. $C_e(T) \sim T^n$ behavior is also expected for superconductors with nodes in the energy gap with $n = 2$ for line nodes and $n = 3$ for point nodes [29], while $C(T) \sim e^{-(\Delta/T)}$ behavior is expected for single-band isotropic s -wave superconductors. It should be

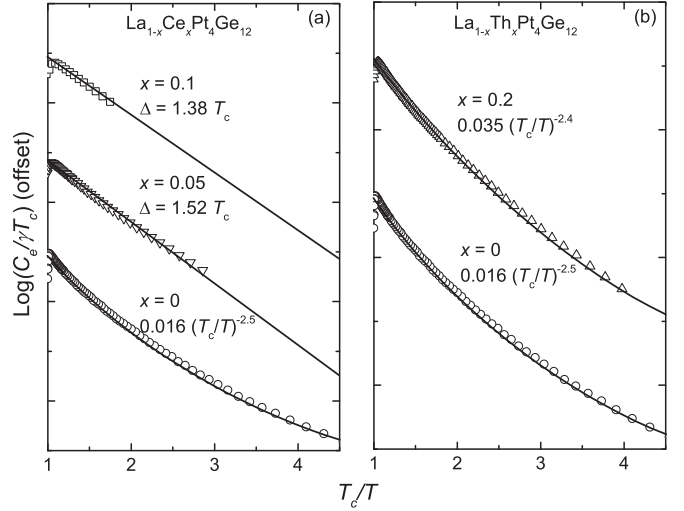


FIG. 7. (a) and (b) The electronic contribution to specific heat plotted as $\log(C_e/\gamma T_c)$ versus T_c/T for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ and $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$, respectively. The data sets were offset for clarity. For the $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ samples, the specific heat data are well described by an exponential temperature dependence of the form $e^{-\Delta/T}$, which is the expected behavior for an isotropic superconducting energy gap. However, the $\text{LaPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ and $\text{La}_{0.8}\text{Th}_{0.2}\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ data exhibit a power-law T^n temperature dependence, where $n \sim 2.5$. This result may be consistent with multiband superconductivity.

noted that this type of analysis based on the temperature-dependence of the specific heat is believed to be valid at low temperatures (i.e., $T \ll T_c$) [29,30]. However, our results, including the change of the temperature-dependence of the specific heat and the rapid initial suppression of T_c , are quite similar to those observed in the $\text{Pr}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ system [9]; this matter has been further investigated by a recent study of the low-temperature specific heat, confirming a crossover in the superconducting gap structure [31]. Combining these factors, we believe that the change in the temperature-dependence of the specific heat is very likely intrinsic to $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$. Noninteger values of n can be due to the contributions to specific heat from multiple superconducting gaps, as was observed in $\text{PrPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ [8]. Our results suggest that multiband superconductivity may also occur in $\text{LaPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ as $C(T)$ for this compound varies as $T^{2.5}$ for $T < T_c$, which is consistent with a recent tunnel-diode-oscillator (TDO) and transverse-field muon-spin rotation (TF- μ SR) spectroscopy measurements on $\text{LaPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$, suggesting marginal two-gap superconductivity in $\text{LaPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ [32]. A nonintegral value of n for Ce substitution may indicate that the system has been driven to single-band conventional superconductivity. The cT^n behavior of $\text{LaPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ was preserved with $n = 2.4$ for $\text{La}_{0.8}\text{Th}_{0.2}\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$.

IV. DISCUSSION

The T_c versus x curve for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ (blue symbols), derived from $\rho(T)$, $M(T)/H$, and $C(T)$, is shown in Fig. 8. Dashed lines in the figure are guides to the eye. The T_c versus x curve for $\text{Pr}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ (red symbols) reported in Ref. [9] is also shown for comparison. Displayed in the inset is the T_c versus x curve for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$. In $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$, the

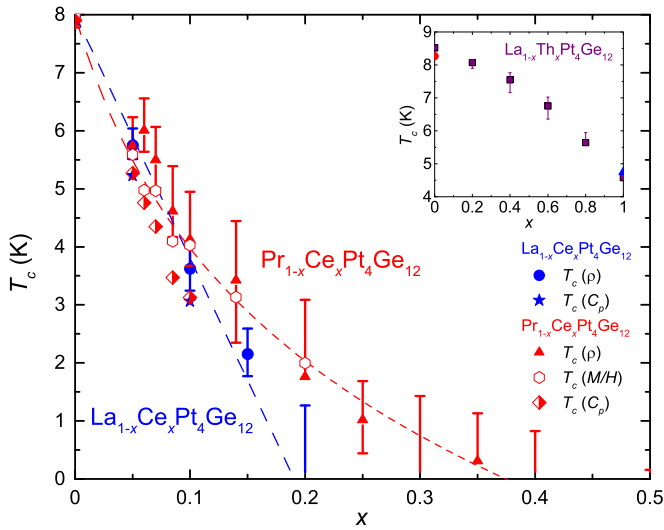


FIG. 8. Plots of the superconducting transition temperature, T_c versus Ce concentration x for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ (blue symbols) and, for comparison, $\text{Pr}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ (red symbols) (Ref. [9]). The dashed lines are guides to the eye. The suppression of T_c with increasing x for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ is greater than in $\text{Pr}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$. Whereas the T_c versus x curve for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ is nearly linear, the T_c versus x curve for $\text{Pr}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ exhibits positive curvature. Shown in the inset is the T_c versus x curve for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ (purple squares). The response of T_c with increasing x is smooth and continuous. The reported T_c values for $\text{LaPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ (Ref. [13]) and $\text{ThPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ (Ref. [3]) are added as a red circle and blue triangle for reference.

initial rate of suppression of T_c , $(dT_c/dx)_{x=0} = -0.4$ K/at. % Ce, is much larger in magnitude than $(dT_c/dx)_{x=0} = -0.04$ K/at. % Th for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$. Because of the positive curvature of T_c versus x in $\text{Pr}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$, we were only able to approximate $(dT_c/dx)_{x=0}$ for $x \leq 0.1$ which yields $(dT_c/dx)_{x=0} \sim -0.4$ K/at. % Ce, close to the value obtained for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$. The series $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ was found to exhibit a rapid and almost linear suppression of T_c with increasing Ce concentration, which extrapolated to 0 K near $x \approx 0.2$. While Ce substitution at low x produces a similar depression of T_c for both $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ and $\text{Pr}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$, at higher Ce concentrations, the T_c versus x curve for $\text{Pr}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ develops strong positive curvature and appears to extrapolate to 0 K at $x \approx 0.4$, roughly twice the value of x where T_c vanishes for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$.

The T_c versus x curves for the $\text{Ln}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ ($\text{Ln} = \text{La}$ and Pr) systems shown in Fig. 8 reveal that the rate of depression of T_c with Ce concentration is similar for the two systems, both of which have values of $T_c \approx 8$ K at $x = 0$, for $x \lesssim 0.1$, and is significantly weaker for $\text{Pr}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ than $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ for $0.1 \lesssim x \lesssim 0.2$. This reveals that the Ce substituents produce stronger superconducting electron pair breaking in the $\text{LaPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ compound, in which the electronic correlations are relatively weak and the superconductivity is conventional [11,12], than in the $\text{PrPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ compound, where the electronic correlations are stronger and the superconductivity is unconventional (e.g., superconductivity breaks time-reversal symmetry) [4–10]. Since the $\text{CePt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ end member compound is also a correlated electron system [11],

the electronic correlations associated with the Ce solutes apparently have a stronger pair breaking effect on the conventional superconductivity exhibited by the $\text{LaPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ parent compound than on the unconventional superconductivity displayed by the $\text{PrPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ parent compound. The shapes of the T_c versus x curves for the $\text{Ln}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ ($\text{Ln} = \text{La}$ and Pr) systems are reminiscent of metallic host metals that exhibit conventional superconductivity containing transition metal, lanthanide, and actinide solute ions with partially-filled d - or f -electron shells in which the normal ground state at superconducting temperatures is nonmagnetic [33]. In these systems, a characteristic temperature T_0 associated with spin fluctuations, valence fluctuations, or the Kondo effect separates high-temperature local moment behavior, characterized by a Curie-Weiss law, and low-temperature nonmagnetic behavior, reflected in a magnetic susceptibility that approaches a finite value as $T \rightarrow 0$ K. When T_0 is much larger than the T_c of the superconducting host metal (T_{c0}), the initial rate of depression of T_c can be quite large and have pronounced positive curvature, similar to that observed for $\text{Pr}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$. This behavior is well established, and exemplary systems in which it has been observed include the $\text{Al}_{1-x}\text{Mn}_x$ [34], $\text{Th}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x$ [35], and $\text{Th}_{1-x}\text{U}_x$ [36] systems, where the Al and Th host metals are conventional superconductors. If one assumes that the temperature at which the magnetic susceptibility of the $\text{Ln}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ ($\text{Ln} = \text{La}$ and Pr) samples attains a maximum value is of the order of the characteristic temperature T_0 , then these systems are in the limit that $T_0 \gg T_{c0}$ (e.g., $T_0 \sim 50$ – 100 K for both the La- and Pr-based systems). It is tempting to compare the T_c versus x data with theories of superconductivity in host-impurity systems that display the Kondo effect, such as the theory of Müller-Hartmann and Zittartz [37]. However, these theories are based on the host metal being a simple one-band conventional BCS superconductor and for noninteracting paramagnetic impurities. The $\text{Ln}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ ($\text{Ln} = \text{La}$ and Pr) compounds have complex Fermi surfaces with multiple sheets that apparently lead to multiband superconductivity [6–9], large Ce solute concentrations in which the interactions between Ce ions increase with Ce concentration, and conventional superconductivity displayed by the La-based compound [11,12] and unconventional superconductivity exhibited by the Pr-based compound [4–10].

Previous studies show that $C(T)$ for $\text{ThPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ exhibits a T^3 temperature dependence for $T < T_c$, which may suggest that there are point nodes in the superconducting energy gap [16]. If this interpretation is correct, the superconductivity exhibited by $\text{ThPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ could be unconventional. Therefore chemical substitution between $\text{ThPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ and $\text{LaPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$, might be expected to result in a pronounced minimum in $T_c(x)$ due to competing superconducting phases as was observed in studies of the filled skutterudite system $\text{PrOs}_{4-x}\text{Ru}_x\text{Sb}_{12}$ [18,19,38]. Instead, we observe a smooth and continuous T_c versus x curve for $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$, showing no evidence for competing superconducting phases. One possible explanation for this behavior is that both $\text{LaPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ and $\text{ThPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ may be multiband superconductors, with each band exhibiting conventional BCS superconductivity. Band-structure calculations demonstrate that $\text{ThPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ exhibits multiple Fermi surface sheets, which is a requirement

for multiband superconductivity [17]. Additionally, the T^3 temperature-dependence of the specific heat was used to suggest point nodes in the energy gap; however, the power-law temperature dependence of $C(T)$ can also be evidence of multiband superconductivity, as was suggested for $\text{PrPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ [8]. With respect to $\text{LaPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$, band-structure calculations also predict multiband crossings at the Fermi energy, E_F [6]. When we combine this with the results from the present study, which show that the specific heat of $\text{LaPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ displays a power-law temperature-dependence in the superconducting state and that the response of superconductivity in $\text{LaPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ to Ce substitution is similar to that in the potential multiband superconductor $\text{PrPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ [6–9], there is mounting evidence for multiband superconductivity in $\text{LaPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$. The apparent similarity of the superconducting states of $\text{LaPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ and $\text{ThPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ reinforces this possibility. However, further work will be necessary to definitively address the nature of the superconducting energy gap(s) in $\text{LaPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ [29,39].

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ and $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ systems were studied by means of electrical resistivity, magnetization, and specific heat measurements. The broad maxima in the $\chi(T)$ data for $\text{CePt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ were suppressed with increasing La concentrations, both in temperature and amplitude, which may be due to weakening of the Ce-Ce interactions with increasing La concentration. Superconductivity in the

$\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ system was rapidly suppressed with increasing Ce concentration, with no evidence for superconductivity down to 1.1 K for $x > 0.2$. The suppression of T_c in $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ is significantly more rapid than previously observed in $\text{Pr}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$, supporting an interpretation that the superconductivity observed in these two systems is different in nature. Specific heat measurements in the superconducting state of $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ revealed a change from a power law to exponential temperature dependence, similar to the results from a study on $\text{Pr}_{1-x}\text{Ce}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$; this may suggest that, although superconductivity in $\text{LaPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ is conventional, while it is unconventional in $\text{PrPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$, both may exhibit a crossover from multiband superconductivity to single-band superconductivity with Ce substitution. In contrast, $\text{LaPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ and $\text{ThPt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ appear to exhibit the same type of superconductivity as evidenced by the continuous and smooth behavior of T_c with increasing x in $\text{La}_{1-x}\text{Th}_x\text{Pt}_4\text{Ge}_{12}$ and the power-law temperature dependence of specific heat in the superconducting state.

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